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DON'T TURN BACK

***Yazoo-Little Tallahatchie* Flood Prevention Project**
Southeastern Area, State and Private Forestry
U. S. D. A. Forest Service

A SPECIAL Y-LT REPORT.....1975

APR 8 1975

END OF THE BEGINNING

The environment of the Yazoo and Little Tallahatchie watersheds of north Mississippi has been rebuilt since the Y-LT Watershed Project began in 1947. Reforestation and plantation management have done a great deal toward nursing these lands back to health. Delegations from all over the world come to Oxford to see for themselves this transformation of the land and to carry back the conservation message to their homelands.

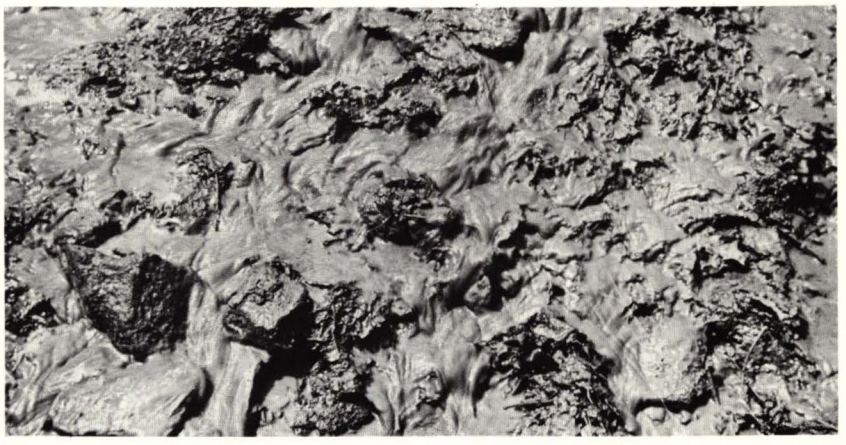
But the job is not over. Completion of the first phase – getting the trees planted – is in sight. The next phase is only beginning: to keep the land in protective forest cover and assure sustained benefits in the future.

The land and the people of north Mississippi have come full circle in less than a century, from prosperity to want and back again. This special report, while summing up our gains, centers on actions needed to avoid a circling back.

ACCOMPLISHED FOR SOIL AND PEOPLE

The significance of the Yazoo-Little Tallahatchie Watershed Project can be summed up in one sentence: Acres that once discharged 300 tons of sediment each year now lose less than one ton. Much of this reduction is due to the forestry program.

On those lands needing forest cover, 647,000 acres of trees have been planted on severely eroded lands since the project started. In addition 270,000 acres have received timber stand improvement to release the planted trees from competing overhead vegetation.



Hand-planting was the chief method of reforestation because of the gullied condition of most lands. Erosion was so advanced that brush dams had to be constructed on 42,000 acres to collect sediment and provide suitable planting sites.

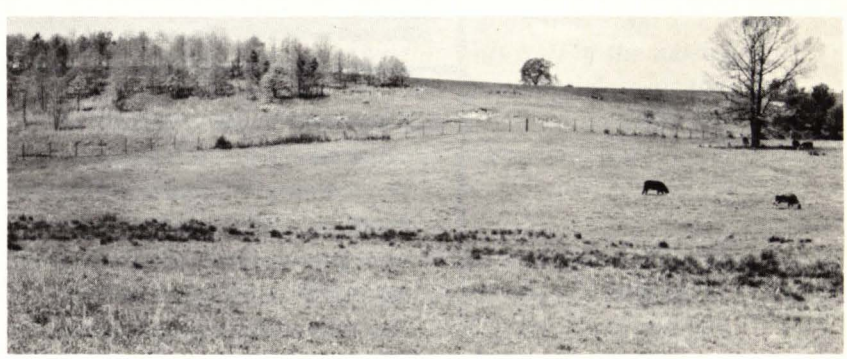
Wildfire, which once damaged or destroyed 30 percent of the ground cover on these 4.2 million acres each year, gradually has been subdued. Acreage burned has been reduced to one-tenth of one percent, due to a vigorous fire prevention and presuppression program conducted by the Mississippi Forestry Commission in cooperation with the Y-LT Project and forest industries.

PROBLEM: CLEARING FOR PASTURE

It's one thing to get trees into the ground. Keeping them there is something else.

A survey of plantations planted in 1958 showed that almost 19 percent have been cleared and not replanted to trees. Other forest lands are being cleared, also; a joint survey by Soil Conservation Service and Forest Service revealed that 13,776 acres were cleared between 1963 and 1971 in Yalobusha and Lafayette Counties. Because these counties are typical of other counties in the watershed, it can be assumed that forested acreage cleared in the 19-county Y-LT area is many times that amount.

Some of these lands are cut purely for pulpwood sales, but the majority are cleared and then converted to pasture for beef cattle. This is a dangerous situation, for most soils planted to trees on the Y-LT are shallow and have a low moisture-storage capacity. The fine-textured subsoil prevents a good grass-root system from developing. The result is low forage production during the summer, and high maintenance expenses that most of the owners cannot meet. This leads to overgrazing on these steep slopes, and repeated deterioration of the land.



Recent hydrologic studies on the Y-LT showed that sheet erosion on prematurely cut plantations is many times greater than on lands bearing trees. On some of the steeper slopes, the erosion rates jump to 100 tons and more per acre per year. At geologic soil building rates it would take 150 years to replace this amount of soil. That's why the erosion-prone lands of the Y-LT were planted to trees in the first place!

A PROGRAM FOR PHASE TWO

EDUCATION

The focus of Phase Two on the Y-LT is centered on helping landowners develop a sense of land capability. The steep slopes in north Mississippi dictate a land use limited to the growing of trees. Conversely, crops should be planted in the lowlands with pastures on the gentle slopes. This is wise land use. This is the key to a lasting victory over erosion and "General Mud."

The educational approach to the problem must be a two-pronged effort involving both information and practice, or "learning by doing." Already in the planning are programs to reach wood dealers and to educate landowners on a person-to-person basis, bolstered by a project-wide information network involving all conservation agencies and organizations, and forest industries.

FORESTATION AND MANAGEMENT

New emphasis is being placed on woodland management. Landowners must know when, how, and where to apply silvicultural practices. A minimum of 700 new forest management plans covering 70,000 acres are needed each year, and 450 need revising annually.

...PHASE TWO

The owners of 35,000 acres of plantations will need management assistance each year to assure that proper thinning and harvesting practices are followed.

Efforts by the Mississippi Forestry Commission, U. S. Forest Service, and others are providing only half of the needed management assistance. To meet the essential needs the MFC is planning a vigorous effort. This will require increased financial support from federal and state government.

Meanwhile, the final segment of the forestation program must be completed. Still to be planted are 125,000 acres of severely eroded lands. Fully half of these will require timber stand improvement after planting.

PHASE TWO

RESEARCH

To develop more economic information, the U.S. Forest Service and Mississippi State University have entered into a cooperative study to determine returns from alternative land uses on the Y-LT; for example, beef cattle versus timber on steep, erosive slopes. The Forest Service has cooperated with MSU on a survey to find out opinions and characteristics of nonindustrial landowners in Mississippi, facts that will assist the information and education effort.

Research has been accelerated by agreement with the Southern Forest Experiment Station's Forest Hydrology Laboratory to develop new management techniques on erosive sites to assure watershed protection.

THE OUTLOOK

Cooperation is an overworked word, but it's the only one that fully describes the past and future of the Yazoo-Little Tallahatchie Flood Prevention Project. To achieve the goals outlined here, the continued cooperation of the people of Mississippi, Soil Conservation Districts, Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Forest Service, Mississippi Forestry Commission, Forestry Industries, and other agencies and organizations that have characterized the entire history of the Y-LT is imperative.

It was good up to here

For more information, write to:

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YAZOO-LITTLE TALLAHATCHIE
Flood Prevention Project